

" Project Mediate "

EDUCATION FOR CHANGE

A Proposal for a Communications Network

developed by Rosemary Ruether
The School of Religion
Howard University
Washington, D.C.

Statement of Purpose

Education for Change would be a multi-media communications network that would seek to promote a broader understanding of the need for social change and to alleviate the legal injustices presently suffered by many dissenters in the United States.

Argument

The United States of America is presently in a state of deep-seated conflict over national goals and values. A complex dissenting movement has arisen which embraces many aspects of national life; cultural, racial, political, social and economic. Many groups, representing different aspects of these social tensions, are demanding fundamental change in national priorities and social structures. This dissenting movement has tended to abandon hope in normal judicial and political processes to make these changes because they see these processes as too deeply embedded in the very problems they would seek to change. Their tactics have often been extra-legal and even extra-political, for this reason. This means, in practice, that they have operated more in the realm of changing cultural and political consciousness than in changing social structures themselves. The movement for social change, despite its drama, has had little effect on the actual shift of political power toward their view. On the contrary, political power has tended to shift toward those reacting against their position. Yet the tactics of symbolic confrontation are producing something like a national paranoia and a campaign of judicial persecution of dissenters all out of proportion to any actual crime they have committed or any real threat which they pose.

Dissenters are receiving jail sentences for verbal abuse or even verbal objections to police brutality. Laws are being passed curtailing the right of peaceable assembly in public places, and many groups are being prosecuted for peaceable assembly under these laws. Judicial harassment is being used against those publishing dissenting newspapers, passing out pamphlets or maintaining coffee houses and other forums of dissent. Vague charges of conspiracy or incitement to riot leave open a wide area for repression of legitimate political dissent. Trumped up charges are being created against groups believed to be radicals, with planted or falsified evidence often being used by the police. We see an increasing willingness to use lethal force on minimal provocation, and the word of authorities in these areas has also become suspect.

These abusive charges and killings threaten the fundamental institutions which might make peaceable change possible. Yet these charges and killings are being upheld by the American public in the opinion that such persons and ideas constitute such a threat to domestic security that virtually any sentence against them is

justified. Thus the atmosphere of American political life is becoming one of mounting hysteria over supposed dangers posed by radicals, while the actual political power shifts dangerously in the direction of militarism and state-sanctioned curtailment of civil liberties. It is also clear that the style and mentality of radicals often is operating in a symbiotic relationship with this reaction. Yet in most cases the radicals actual stand for what can only be said to be 'conservative' values in the American political tradition. They stand for making democracy work, for extending its benefits to all citizens, for curbing foreign involvement at the expense of domestic social needs and for the maintenance of a healthful physical environment. And yet, because they have used an inflammatory rhetoric and tactics, often have not carefully understood the actual basis and nature of the current problems, and have often concluded that these changes cannot be made except through revolutionary means, the actual content of their message has become lost for most Americans. Yet these misunderstandings are taking their toll on law enforcement as well. Enormous amounts of funds are spent on guarding buildings and prosecuting dissenters at a time when the real 'crime in the streets' is running rampant and little is being done to control it. Moreover it is the poorest people who suffer the most from this real crime. One lawyer recently described this situation as 'an identity crisis for law and order in America'.

There is growing evidence of serious misalignment of our national resources and priorities. A huge military machine absorbs 66% of the national budget of the richest nation in the world while all other national institutions go begging. Limitless funds are available for warfare and the curbing of dissent, but only pennies for the positive reconstruction of society. Therefore we must recognize a fundamental dislocation in the moral and social priorities of the nation and the need to enter an in-depth struggle for the national consciousness that can create a clearer perception of the true dangers and a will to remake instruments of political life that can massively shift national resources toward the reconstruction of society.

A Proposal for education for change

Education for Change would seek to be a communicating and mediating force between frustrated dissent and misinformed reaction in American society. The Education for Change communications network would create research materials, pamphlets, magazine articles, films and plays, forums and conferences, newsletters and a speakers' and writers' bureau on the values of the dissenting groups. Its purpose would be to seek to break out of the circle of those already atune to these movements and to communicate the values of dissent and the facts of legal injustice to dissenters to Americans presently confused, ignorant or hostile to such problems. This assumes the possibility of a large area of common interest between dissent and ordinary Americans, could they but better understand each other. It assumes that a majority of both groups actually have the best interest of America at heart. Moreover dissenters need the practical expertise of middle Americans as much as middle Americans need to hear and understand much of the criticism being voiced by dissenters.

In order to make possible some improvement in communication between dissenters and middle Americans we must find new forms of persuasive language to talk about and translate the values of those who are using radical language and confrontationalist tactics. Education for Change would consciously explore the possibilities of acting as such a 'translation service' for dissent, without watering down the import of its message. Such translation is essential if radicals are to get out of their present syndrome of 'talking to themselves' and to widen the base of those who understand the need for social change. Education for Change would work in the conviction that such change cannot come about through random blows against society, but only through the development of a new liberal coalition which can marshal the political power to bring about such change. Within the framework of existing possibilities, this can only mean some restructuring of American political instruments to make them useable. It is as important to educate radicals to understand the futility of violent revolutionary means to bring about the change they want as it is to educate the Right to the futility of legal repression and militarism.

Organization and Program of Education for Change

Initially the Education for Change network would consist of a national research and coordinating centre, based at Emmaus House in New York City. This national centre would develop a network of affiliated individuals and groups who would contribute their time and ability, mostly on a volunteer basis. These might consist of the following:

- a) a speakers' and writer's bureau to write pamphlets, magazine articles, give talks, conduct forums and research specific topics.
- b) a research team that would work on gathering materials on dissent and legal repression for speakers and writers. This research centre would be based at Emmaus House.
- c) drama groups
- d) film making groups, both for TV documentaries and local showing.
- e) special task forces. The first of these would be a D.C. task force that would concentrate on congressional contacts on the problems of dissent and repression and means of alleviating the conditions of political prisoners. Such a group might also seek investigation of prison conditions, especially in the military stockades.
- f) a 'liturgical' group that would work specifically in the area of researching new symbols and media of communication in public gatherings.

This communications network would work both on the preparatory process of developing a new political consensus and on the work of direct political campaigning, by making its materials available to candidates for office, providing research and speakers for such candidates and developing forms and programs for restructured political organizations.

Organization and Minimal Budget to start the Education for Change Network

Much of the work for the education for change network would be on a volunteer basis. Pamphlets and talks, plays and films hopefully might pay for themselves. Both Emmaus House and the Community of Christ in Washington D.C. can provide office space and volunteer help for the national centre and the D.C. task force. Therefore the initial minimal budgetary needs ~~are~~ consist of salaries for a full time coordinator for the centre and Emmaus House and for a director of the D.C. task force. In addition each of these full time workers would need a budget for travel, supplies and expenses. As funding grew, full time staff could be expanded, but the minimum financial needs to begin this project would be about \$25,000.

salary of national coordinator -	\$9,000.
supplies and expenses -	\$4,000.
salary of D.C. director -	\$9,000.
supplies and expenses -	\$3,000.
total -	\$25,000.

Return to:

Education for Change; c/o Rosemary Ruether
1438 Montague St. N.W.
Washington, D.C.

- ☐ I am interested in becoming a personal contributor to this project.
- ☐ I am interested in helping to fund it through organizations with which I have contact.
- ☐ I am interested in contributing my talents to some area of this program.
- ☐ I am interested in being on the mailing list for the materials this group will be developing.

name _____
ADDRESS _____
